

Hepatitis C

FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County
Health Department

All adults, pregnant people, and people with risk factors should get tested for hepatitis C. Treatments can prevent serious health problems and cure hepatitis C in as little as 8 to 12 weeks.

What is hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C (or “hep C”) is a liver disease caused by the *hepatitis C virus* (HCV).

Most people who get hepatitis C are not able to clear, or get rid of, the virus without treatment within the first six months of infection. Most people who get infected will develop a chronic (lifelong) infection. Untreated chronic hepatitis C can cause serious health problems, including liver disease, liver failure, liver cancer, or even death.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis C virus is usually spread when someone comes into contact with blood from an infected person. This can happen through the sharing of drug injection or preparation equipment, through birth from mother to baby, healthcare exposures, sex with an infected person, unregulated tattoos or body piercings, sharing personal care items, and through blood transfusions and organ transplants before 1992.

What are the symptoms?

Many people with hepatitis C initially do not have symptoms and don't know they are infected. When symptoms do appear, they often are a sign of advanced liver disease. Symptoms include abdominal pain, clay-colored bowel movements, dark urine, joint pain, yellowing of the skin and eyes, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, fever, and/or extreme fatigue.

Hepatitis C can be prevented.

There are ways to reduce risk of becoming infected:

- Avoid sharing or reusing needles, syringes, or any other equipment used to prepare and inject drugs, steroids, hormones, or other substances. Utilize sterile syringes and materials provided by Syringe Service Programs (<https://bit.ly/syrserp>).
- Do not use personal items that may have come into contact with an infected person's blood.
- Do not get tattoos or body piercings from an unlicensed facility or in an informal setting.

Who should be tested for hepatitis C?

Getting tested is the only way to know if you have hepatitis C. **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends hepatitis C testing for all adults (ages 18+)**, as well as anyone who:

- ✓ Is pregnant (get tested during every pregnancy)
- ✓ Currently injects drugs (get tested regularly)
- ✓ Has ever injected drugs, even if it was just once or many years ago
- ✓ Was born to a mother with hepatitis C
- ✓ Has HIV
- ✓ Is on hemodialysis
- ✓ Has abnormal liver tests or liver disease
- ✓ Has been exposed to blood from a person who has hepatitis C
- ✓ Received clotting factor concentrates before 1987
- ✓ Received donated blood or organs before 07/1992

Talk to your health care provider about getting tested. The Health Department can also provide hepatitis C testing: call **734-544-6700** to schedule.

Hepatitis C can be cured.

Getting tested for hepatitis C is important to find out if you are infected: lifesaving treatments are available.

Treatments can cure most people with hepatitis C in 8 to 12 weeks. If you have been diagnosed with hepatitis C, talk to your health care provider about treatment options. There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

If you are enrolled in Michigan Medicaid or the Healthy Michigan Plan, the “We Treat Hep C” initiative ensures that you can be treated regardless of recent or current substance use or liver damage. Enrollees may be treated by non-specialists for their hepatitis C infection, including primary care and advanced practice providers. To find a treatment provider near you, visit michigan.gov/WeTreatHepC.

See more info and resources:

washtenaw.org/HepC



This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.